

My name is Juan Colon and I am submitting my testimony in support of the Governor's proposed budget which maintains funding to the Homeless Youth line item. I am currently 23 years old and am receiving services through the homeless youth program, run by The Connection.

Before getting involved with The Connection, I was homeless, jumping from house to house, and not really having the support I needed to make sure I was going down the right path in life. I stayed outside days, even weeks at a time because I didn't have someone to rely on to help me in my time of need. I was homeless for two years, staying on friends and family member's couches, outside, and in the end was connected to the Connection Young Adult Shelter. During those two years I reached out to 211 and they tried to admit me into a shelter but with my age, I did not feel comfortable with older adults and families I did not know in that type of setting.

Growing up I considered myself as the black sheep; the only lefty around a whole flock of righties. I was involved with DCF for 15 years and had moved around too many times to even count. I went to school and graduated, but even that was a struggle. My life has been a roller coaster since leaving high school. I bounced from house to house after getting kicked out of my mom's home several times. I went days without eating sometimes because my pride didn't let me ask for help and I didn't want people to know that I was homeless. So I started running the streets until a stranger reached out and assisted me on getting back on the right road. I became a youth leader, even as I was homeless it changed my perspective on life. I started caring about my life again and wanted to become something, not just a statistic. I was comfortable to say I was a homeless youth to help others in need and share my story. Being a homeless youth was part of my life.

I found a program called Our Piece of the Pie that have helped me get a job and return to school. Our Piece of the Pie connected me with The Connection, who gave me a place to stay in their Emergency Shelter that was strictly for young people like me. The Connection gave me a safe place to stay so that I could focus on studying for my classes and work on completing my certificate in the Administrative Medical Assistant field. I have now moved out of their shelter and into another program of theirs that temporarily helps me pay for my own apartment and become independent. I thank The Connection for the help and pushing for me to strive and do better. Being in The Connection, I was finally able to get off the streets of Hartford. My motivation and drive has been uplifted to where I need it to be in order to be successful in life. With a stable, safe place, and working with their program staff, I am now even employed. I am currently working with other youth leaders to create a safe place for kids to go after school in the Hartford area. My long term goal is work with children in a school setting where I can be a role model.

I've recently even started talking to my parents again, trying to build a new relationship where I am in charge of my life.

Without this Homeless Youth line item having been preserved, I wouldn't have had these opportunities this year. Instead of sitting here before you today, right about now, I'd be scrambling to find some place...any place to stay tonight. So thank you, members of the

Appropriations Committee, for investing in young people like me despite the very difficult funding decisions that you are faced with.

Thank you for your time

Juan Colon